

That favorite is all Jolson eyes and kidney sweat. The jockey crosses himself, gets a leg up and then bails out as she tries a Pegasus.

"So what about it? You're the handicapper."

"Hard to say. I wouldn't bet the rent, though."

"Bullshit. Big horseplayer, big gambler, big knowitall big shot. Mary told me how often you won. She got old waiting for a winner. I come out once a year and even I know a Syndicate horse when I see one. That baby is hopped to the eyes. She'll win and then some. Get smart finally."

Nothing to do but tourist, so I walk down to the turn and watch the jockies pump. The short-price hangs on for third.

16,000 people at the track and I bump into him again, he's coming out of the show line rubbing his dimes together.

"Don't give me that look," he says. "Mary told me all about you, you superior bastard. She told me everything. She said she hated you, she hated you from the beginning, she hated everything you stood for. You were like the others. You were crazy and you tried to drive her crazy. But she's happy with me now, goddamned happy and everything's fine. I've got the most wonderful little lady in the world and you've got nothing. Christ, do I pity you."

He drew a little crowd, like a coronary. I left him there with the people nudging each other and side-mouthing it and went over to the bar, had a drink, and looked at the next race.

-- Ronald Koertge

Pasadena CA

CLOCKWORK BARLEY

g. is in his mid-20's
and has been drinking in the bar
for as long as any of us can remember,
so much so that we don't really consider the place
open for business until he arrives, doffs his hans brinker
cap,
and orders a bud.
he's drunk a lot of the time,
often rather early in the day,
but he never gets loud or surly or abusive.
yes, his drinking manners are impeccable,
and he can still comport himself with dignity

at offensive tackle on the bar flag-football team.
when drunk, in fact, he will sometimes wax quite witty,
though more often his eyes just fill
with sleep and failure.

in appearance, he reminds some of us of gatsby,
although g. started out rich
his father a high-priced physician,
and went rapidly nowhere.
his wife, like himself, is spoiled and beautiful;
she is forever leaving him.

lately the beer and dope and pills
had seemed to be getting the better of him.
he shot himself in the chest, allegedly by accident,
not too long ago,
and he's had three 502's in the past two months.

so he spent last week in the hospital,
drying out and undergoing aversion therapy,
replete with films and lectures, humiliations,
and that medicine that knocks you off your ass,
if you so much as sniff a drink.

he got out yesterday
and today he was back in the bar.
at first he just hung onto a coke bottle,
and then i noticed him squeezing a beer.
he took a couple of tentative sips,
and rose immediately to stride,
with the controlled haste of a true aristocrat,
to the men's room.

when he came out, however,
he went right back at that beer,
like a cowpoke dead-assed determined to break
the bronc that threw him,

like jack dempsey climbing back inside the ropes.

the kid has character.

COMMISERATION

when i called ron tonight,
he was storming about his apartment, wearing a path in
the carpet,
etching in the acid of his salivating wit
a fit reply to an unusually obnoxious junior editor.